Chief Reader Report on Student Responses:

2025 AP® United States Government and Politics Free-Response Questions

Set 2

- Number of Students Scored 388,804
- Number of Readers 1574
- Score Distribution

Exam Score	N	%At
5	92,022	23.7
4	96,493	24.8
3	90,277	23.2
2	71,529	18.4
1	38,483	9.9

- Global Mean 3.34

The following comments on the 2025 free-response questions for AP® United States Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Stella Rouse, Professor, Arizona State University, with assistance from AP Reading leadership. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

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Question 1

Task: Concept Application
Topic: Bureaucratic Discretion and Congressional Oversight

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Part A	1	0.36
Part B	1	0.57
Part C	1	0.54

Overall Mean Score: 1.47

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The concept application question expected responses to apply course concepts to a provided real-world scenario. The focus of the scenario was about the concerns of activists to actions taken by a bureaucratic agency, the United States Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), an administration within the Department of Transportation. The scenario addresses several topics in the course and exam description from Unit 2 and Unit 5 that relate to the roles of the federal bureaucracy, ways that Congress can exercise control over the federal bureaucracy, and the role of group advocacy in the policymaking process. This question expected responses to demonstrate an understanding of the interaction between a bureaucratic agency, Congress, and citizens in a pluralist democracy.

In Part A, responses were expected to describe the power of the federal bureaucracy to make rules or exercise discretion. The focus in part A was for the responses to use the information in the scenario to demonstrate that the agency involved was making policy decisions using their discretionary power or making regulations using their rulemaking authority. However, some responses just identified the bureaucracy carrying out policy without demonstrating an understanding that the agency was making changes or choosing how to establish rules.

In Part B, responses were expected to explain how Congress could counteract the bureaucracy's use of discretion. Some responses explained how Congress could pass new laws that restricted the policy choices of the agency, how Congress could change the funding of the agency which would make it less able to carry out its policy choices, or how Congress used oversight to pressure the agency to align more with congressional intent. However, many responses simply identified an action taken by Congress without explaining how that action would impact the bureaucratic agency in the scenario.

In Part C, responses were expected to explain how the concept of pluralism was illustrated through the work of citizen groups by explaining the role of groups in attempting to pressure policy makers. Responses demonstrated an understanding of pluralism by describing how groups took action to formally pressure policymakers. Some responses failed to explain how groups could pressure or influence government institutions. Some responses failed to reference groups at all.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

In Part A, some responses were able to correctly describe the agency using discretion to create new regulations or to change safety guidelines dealing with the transportation of liquefied natural gas. However, responses generally struggled to describe the bureaucratic agency's role in using discretion or rulemaking. Responses were able to recognize things that the agency was doing in the scenario, like "issuing permits," but neglected to recognize the agency making decisions about the policies. Some responses described enforcement actions or implementation by the agency, without describing the agency's decisions about rules and regulations.

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In Part B, responses were generally able to identify an action Congress could take, and explain how it limited the agency's ability to make choices. In addition, many responses would correctly describe an appropriate action that Congress could take (cut funding, passing a law) but they failed to explain how this would counteract the agency's use of discretion.

In Part C, most responses were able to explain how citizens' groups illustrated the concept of pluralism. Responses were generally able to demonstrate an understanding of pluralism by explaining how groups in the scenario were advocating, pressuring, or attempting to influence the policymaking process. Responses were able to explain a variety of interactions between group activism and different policymakers ranging from the agency, to Congress, or the presidential administration. However, though many responses would correctly describe group activism they did not make any connection to policymakers or the policymaking process.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• In Part A some responses would simply repeat information directly from the prompt of the scenario where the agency was taking an action (issued the first permit, expanded the practice), without any acknowledgement that the agency was exercising discretion over the policies themselves. Some responses would focus on the agency's role in implementing or carrying out the policies instead of focusing attention on the agency making decisions about what the rules are.	• *"The power that the bureaucratic agency used in this scenario is discretionary authority. Discretionary authority is the idea that the bureaucracy can implement policy and create rules as it sees fit."* • *"[A]gencies have discretionary authority when making decisions like the transportation of LNG by rail."*
• In Part B most responses could describe an action that Congress could take in response to the scenario, however they would not adequately explain how the action taken by Congress would have any impact on the agency to counteract its use of discretion. Additionally, some responses incorrectly described actions, such as judicial review or vetoing bureaucratic actions.	• *"Congress's ability to manage funding is a result of them having the power of the purse … By not giving enough money to the PHMSA … this counteracts the PHMSA's ability to properly make more permits like they wish to."* • *"If Congress did not like the transportation of LNG through the use of railway, committees … may call for an oversight hearing with department figures to testify. If Congress does not approve of the action and sees it as an expansion of power, they have the power to limit the department's funding and resources/support."*
• In Part C some responses could not demonstrate an understanding of the concept of pluralism and instead emphasized individual actions to influence policymakers. Other responses would explain the role of groups in uniting people around a common interest, but would fail to	• *"Citizens' groups in this scenario illustrates the concept of pluralist democracy because these groups are coming together to express their concerns and influence the government to take a certain action."*

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connect those groups to the policymaking process through group action.	• *"Citizens' groups … voiced their concerns about the transportation of LNG by rail but could not muster enough support in Congress for a new law."*

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

Teachers could offer more guidance on the roles that the federal bureaucracy has in the executive branch. Teachers could also practice how to respond to task verbs. Many responses would identify the correct action that Congress could take but would not go on to explain any actual impact on the bureaucratic agency. By practicing writing prompts that ask for explanations, students would more fully develop their reasoning and writing skills. Teachers could emphasize that appropriate responses to the task verb *explain* should include both actions and impacts of those actions.

Teachers could provide regular opportunities for students to practice the task verbs that are found in the free response portion of the exam (*identify*, *describe*, *compare*, *explain*) through bellringers, class activities, class discussions, homework, or exit tickets, so that students will more clearly understand the expectations for the writing portion of the exam. This would allow students to more fully develop their reasoning and writing skills in response to this type of question. Activities could include discussions where students are expected to fully describe or explain a concept in relation to a prompt teachers provide or prompts that students write for themselves. Students could also be asked to compare and evaluate other students' responses in a discussion.

Teachers could also have students review examples of sample responses to understand what is expected of them on the concept application question. Through the practice of scoring these responses, students can help understand what a reader is looking for in this FRQ and read the notes that go along with the responses.

Teachers should also reference the instructional planning report from last year's AP exam results to evaluate their scores on this and other FRQs.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. The CED describes bureaucratic power in Topic 2.13 "Discretionary and Rulemaking Authority." Congress's power of oversight is addressed in Topic 2.14 "Holding the Bureaucracy Accountable." The pluralist model of democracy is described in Topic 1.2 "Types of Democracy."
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase challenge as teachers progress through the course.
- AP Classroom also includes topic specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. 2.13: Daily Video 1 looks at how discretionary and rulemaking authority are given to various bureaucratic agencies, and practices concept application. 2.14: Daily Video 1 analyzes how Congressional oversight, presidential ideology, and compliance monitoring keep the bureaucracy accountable and influence its actions.
- 2023 AP Exam On-Demand Review videos explain in detail strategies for responding to each FRQ type, including Practice sessions 2 and 3 that focus on FRQ 1 Concept Application.

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- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the concept application FRQ, Unit 2-Data Analysis and Concept Application.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

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Question 2

Task: Quantitative Analysis
Topic: Elections for Senator and President, 1980 to 2022

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Part A	1	0.94
Part B	1	0.89
Part C	1	0.49
Part D	1	0.32

Overall Mean Score: 2.64

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Responses to the quantitative analysis question are expected to demonstrate the ability to read and interpret data related to state elections for senator and president between 1980 and 2022. The graph showed the percentage of Senate elections won by candidates of the same party as their state's most recent presidential election winner.

In Part A responses were expected to identify the percentage of Senate elections won by candidates of the same party as their state's most recent presidential election winner in 2018, according to the data in the line graph.

In Part B responses were expected to describe the overall trend in the data shown in the line graph.

In Part C responses were expected to draw a conclusion regarding the level of partisanship among voters since 1980, using the data shown in the line graph.

In Part D responses were expected to explain how the overall trend shown in the line graph could reflect changes in how people acquire political news.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

In Part A, the majority of responses correctly identified 76% (or between 75% and 80%) as the percentage of Senate elections won by candidates of the same party as their state's most recent presidential election winner in 2018.

In Part B, a majority of responses correctly described the overall trend in the data shown in the graph of people choosing a Senate and presidential candidate from the same party as increasing. Some responses described the individual data points in the graph or described the graph in its entirety, not describing the overall trend in the graph.

In Part C, while most responses accurately drew a conclusion about the level of partisanship among voters since 1980 as increasing which was demonstrated by an increase in straight ticket voting, some responses neglected to draw a connection to voting and/or elections and instead focused on the benefits that come with a majority in government (i.e., easier to get bills passed, greater cooperation within the government, etc.).

In Part D, while most responses accurately explained how the overall trend shown in the graph could reflect changes in how people acquire political news, some responses explained that social media had increased from 1980 to 2022, however, the responses did not make the connection that voters seek biased news that could reinforce their political views. Some responses did write about the increased role that the internet played over time from 1980 to 2022 in helping voters become exposed to biased news, but the responses did not mention whether that exposure influenced voters. Other responses mentioned that social media allows voters to

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consume types of news that they want to see rather than a range of perspectives, potentially leading to biases. Many focused on the growth of social media and other media evolution from 1980 to 2022 but did not discuss the rise in bias of media and that voters would seek out that biased media, etc.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• In Part A some responses did not identify the correct percentage.	• *"in 2018 is about 75%"* • *"76%"* • *"The graph shows that the percent of Senate elections won by candidates of the same party as their states most recent presidential election winner in 2018 is about 80%."*
• In Part B some responses did not accurately describe the overall trend.	• *"The overall trend in the data shown in the line graph is that between 1980 and 2022, the percentage of Senate elections won by candidates of the same party as their state's most recent presidential election winner has increased on average over time.'*
• In Part C some responses did not clearly demonstrate an understanding of the level of partisanship because it did not explain what is increasing or draw an accurate conclusion.	• *"The conclusion that can be drawn about partisanship among voters since 1980 using this graph is that voters have become much more partisan"* • *"As time goes on voters begin consistently picking senators of the same party affiliation as the last presidential election"*
• In part D some responses did not explain how the trend could reflect changes in how people acquire political news	• *"This means that people are voting more and more with the same party. This is because people are watching more polarized news sources, and in recent years haven't been making sure to consume a variety of information with different perspectives. Additionally, the development of social media has also led to political polarization, as people are being fed content that aligns with their beliefs."*

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

Teachers could emphasize a thorough reading of the prompt before attempting to answer the question. At times, the Quantitative Analysis question has asked for "a trend" but this question asked for "the overall

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trend." There was only one acceptable answer to the trend, and the response needed to include that the overall trend was increasing.

Teachers could emphasize the application of political concepts and processes from the course to data provided in graphs and charts.

Teachers could expose students to data presented in a variety of different methods and styles. Teachers could also implement something like a "graph of the week" where they identify a particular style, tied to the unit or lesson. This could then be analyzed using the different elements of "Skill Category 3" from the Course and Exam Description (CED) or Curriculum Guide, which requires data analysis. AP Classroom is also a great tool for identifying questions which incorporate data analysis, both in multiple choice questions, and in the FRQs. Teachers could also emphasize looking at entire data sets and identifying trends within the entirety of the data as opposed to isolated data points.

Teachers could help students connect and recall relevant course concepts and apply them to the data provided. Teachers could emphasize the practical implications of increasing partisanship in the Senate and presidential elections and not just the conceptual applications. Teachers could make connections to data and the motivations of media and other news sources and the actions they take to influence voters' political preference and ideology to achieve their goals.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. For content support in responding to this FRQ, the CED addresses partisanship in Topic 2.3 "Congressional Behavior." The role of the media as a linkage institution is addressed in Topic 5.12 "The Media" and ways in which media is changing is addressed in Topic 5.13 "Changing Media."
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase challenge as teachers progress through the course.
- AP Classroom also includes topic specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. 2.3: Daily Video 1 focuses on congressional behavior and effectiveness, the role of partisanship, divided government, gridlock, and role conceptions of members of Congress. 5.12: Daily Video 1 analyzes how choice and variety in media coverage affects citizens' knowledge about political issues. 5.13: Daily Video 1 explains how evolving media conglomerates use increasing bias and narrowcasting to affect citizen political knowledge.
- 2023 AP Exam On-Demand Review videos explain in detail strategies for responding to each FRQ type, including Practice session 4, which focuses on FRQ 2 Quantitative Analysis.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has skill-based modules on teaching the Quantitative Analysis FRQ; Unit 2-Data Analysis and Concept Application and Unit 4-Data Analysis.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

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Question 3

Task: SCOTUS Comparison
Topic: *Shaw* v *Reno* and Racial Gerrymandering

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Part A	1	0.70
Part B	2	1.37
Part C	1	0.23

Overall Mean Score: 2.30

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The SCOTUS comparison question provided a summary of a non-required Supreme Court case (*Bush* v. *Vera*) and expected responses to compare this non-required case to a case required in the course (*Shaw* v. *Reno*).
In Part A responses were expected to identify the constitutional clause common to both cases.
Part B required an explanation of how the facts in *Shaw* v. *Reno* and *Bush* v. *Vera* led to similar holdings.
In Part C responses were expected to explain how the decision in *Bush* v. *Vera* relates to the democratic ideal of republicanism.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

In Part A most responses correctly identified the Equal Protection Clause as the constitutional clause that was common to both *Shaw* and *Bush*.

In Part B to earn one point, the response had to describe correct information (fact or holding) about the required case, *Shaw* v. *Reno*. Most responses did this well, whether discussing *Shaw* alone or in reference to both cases.

In Part B to earn two points, the response must demonstrate an understanding of the required case, and then explain how the facts in both the required and non-required cases led to similar holdings. Some responses discussed the facts of the non-required case (*Bush*) without discussing the required case (*Shaw*). Additionally, other responses failed to include a discussion of similar holdings.

Responses struggled the most with Part C of this FRQ. Many responses failed to demonstrate an understanding of republicanism. Additionally, some responses misinterpreted the decision of the *Bush* case. Finally, other responses did not sufficiently relate republicanism to the decision in *Bush or* attempted to relate republicanism to *Bush* without effectively discussing republicanism, the *Bush* decision, or both.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• In Part A some responses did not identify the equal protection clause but instead cited the due process clause or another Constitutional clause.	• *"The constitutional clause used for both Shaw v. Reno and Bush v. Vera is the equal protection clause."*

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• In Part B some responses did not mention race as the common factor in gerrymandering. • Many responses did not earn 2 points because they lacked discussion about the similar holdings.	• *"Racial gerrymandering was used in both cases to draw congressional districts."* • *"With both Shaw v. Reno and Bush v. Vera, the decision to strike down proposals to redraw and gerrymander current districts was based on race, ultimately resulting in similar holdings, which both affirmed similar ideas which highlighted how gerrymandering based on race was considered unconstitutional and even discriminatory."*
• Some responses were unable to connect the decision in *Bush* v. *Vera* to the democratic ideal of republicanism.	• *"Republicanism is an idea that focuses on how people's opinions are voiced through their representatives. With Bush v. Vera, striking down the redistricting plan would mean that the majority's voice still had representation in Congress, ultimately tying back to this ideal of republicanism."*

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

Teachers should make use of content review from AP Central to help ensure students are well versed in the required SCOTUS cases.

Teachers could emphasize that, while the information within the prompt is important for understanding the concepts presented in the nonrequired case, the response should not merely repeat information. Strong responses use the information in the question but go beyond what is provided in order to demonstrate understanding. This includes encouraging students to fully explain their answers.

Teachers should access past AP Central free response questions to find sample responses that earned points in each part of the FRQ. This would also help students to understand task verbs such as identify, describe, and explain along with learning what each task verb requires.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. The CED addresses the Supreme Court cases that are required for this course on pages 27–32. This section also includes a cross-reference table with suggestions for opportunities to show relationships between these cases and course concepts. This section also includes a table with terms and definitions for how these terms are used when assessing FRQ 3.
- Topic 2.3 Congressional Behavior specifically addresses equal protection challenges to redistricting, which is central to *Shaw* v. *Reno* (1993). Additionally, Topic 2.1 Congress: The Senate and the House of Representatives describes the democratic principle of republicanism.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative

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items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase challenge as teachers progress through the course.

- AP Classroom also includes topic specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. 2.3: Daily Video 2 focuses on redistricting, gerrymandering, and representation of constituents by members of Congress. 2.3: Daily Video 3 focuses on SCOTUS Application Skill 2.A with required cases *Baker* v. *Carr* and *Shaw* v. *Reno*.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the SCOTUS Comparison FRQ, Unit 3-Supreme Court Case Analysis.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

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Question 4

Task: Argument Essay
Topic: Preserving Limited Government via an Elected Legislature and an Independent Judiciary

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Thesis	1	0.77
Evidence	3	1.93
Reasoning	1	0.54
Alternative Perspective	1	0.30

Overall Mean Score: 3.53

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This Argument Essay question expected responses to demonstrate an understanding of the extent to which an elected legislature and an independent judiciary best preserve the democratic ideal of limited government. Responses also need to show an understanding of foundational documents related to the concepts of the nature or method of how an elected legislature and independent judiciary best preserve limited government (*Federalist* No. 51, *Federalist* No. 78, Article I of the Constitution), while taking a position on the topic of the prompt.

Responses were expected to articulate a defensible claim/thesis and establish a line of reasoning; support the thesis with evidence from the course concepts and/or foundational document(s); use reasoning to explain why the evidence provided supports the thesis; and respond to an alternative perspective using rebuttal or refutation. Responses should have been written so that each of these skills was demonstrated in the form of a narrative. The different tasks within this question required responses to demonstrate several higher-order thinking skills and apply substantive knowledge about the democratic ideal of limited government. It also required responses to demonstrate how an elected legislature and independent judiciary could more effectively preserve the democratic ideal of limited government, while using the argumentation skill from the course.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

In general, responses defended both positions, as neither position was used more than another. Responses could take the position that an elected legislature was more effective at preserving limited government because they are elected and therefore accountable to the people or because they are able to check other branches of government from abusing power. Responses could also take the position that an independent judiciary was more effective at preserving limited government because they are insulated from political pressure and therefore make decisions aligned with the Constitution or because they are able to check other branches or state governments with their power of judicial review.

Most responses made a successful claim and established a defensible line of reasoning by taking one of the paths available in the prompt. When addressing the thesis point, responses that did not provide a line of reasoning at the beginning were often able to establish one somewhere else in the response to earn the point.

Most responses were also able to provide at least one piece of evidence from one of the listed foundational documents or a course concept, and many were able to provide more than one piece of evidence. Responses that failed to earn evidence points identified foundational documents but provided inaccurate information about the document or provided information about non-listed foundational documents that were not relevant or supportive of the position taken in the prompt.

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Responses that earned the reasoning point were able to explain why an elected legislature and independent judiciary are more effective at preserving limited government using one piece of evidence described. Responses that failed to earn the reasoning point repeated the line of reasoning provided in the thesis without explaining how or why the evidence provided supported the thesis. Some attempts at reasoning did not earn a separate reasoning point because they were used for the line of reasoning for the thesis/claim.

Although responses generally demonstrated some understanding of an alternative viewpoint, they often neglected to frame answers in a way that both demonstrated understanding of the other side and responded to that argument with a rebuttal or refutation. Responses that failed to earn the alternative perspective point did not make an affirmative argument for the other position in the prompt; alternatively, they argued against their original position.

Responses could earn 1 point by providing a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning. Incorrect responses simply restated the prompt without establishing a line of reasoning or providing a thesis that addressed whether an elected legislature or an independent judiciary were more effective in preserving limited government. Some attempts at a thesis included arguments that one of these branches does not preserve limited government (rather than making a positive argument favoring one), or that both of the branches played an important role in preserving limited government. However, the prompt directed responses to include an argument regarding which branch best preserved limited government. Many responses did not clearly state a claim and line of reasoning at the start of the response, which made it necessary to find the line of reasoning in another part of the response. A common error was listing the name of the documents alone as the line of reasoning. For example, a response stated, "An independent judiciary is best at preserving limited government because of Federalist 51 and Federalist 78."

Responses could earn up to 2 points by describing evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt or up to 3 points by using evidence to support the claim or thesis. The most frequent error included responses that confused foundational documents. Many responses provided evidence using course concepts that were not relevant to the topic provided in the prompt. For example, some responses made a claim that the president was critical to decisiveness in policymaking or that they could effectively preserve limited government.

A response could also earn a point for reasoning by explaining how or why a piece of evidence supports an argument relevant to the prompt. Reasoning requires the response to go beyond describing the evidence to demonstrating a clearly articulated explanation. In this question, students needed to explain how a connection (elected legislature) or insulation from public sentiments preserved limited government OR explain the role of that branch in checking the power of other branches. Sometimes, responses included reasoning for the evidence, yet did not earn the reasoning point. In these instances, responses either did not support the thesis or did not have a clearly articulated thesis/claim.

A response could earn a point by providing an opposing or alternative perspective using refutation or rebuttal. For the alternative perspective portion of the question, common errors included responses that failed to describe the alternative perspective and instead explained that some people would disagree with the stated claim. For example, in some responses the thesis would be about the elected legislature, and the alternative perspective would describe the viewpoint that is critical of Congress but did not provide an argument for the other side that favored the independent judiciary. Another common mistake would be simply stating what the alternative perspective was and not describing why people would have that opinion. Other responses explained an alternative perspective but failed to provide a rebuttal or refutation of that viewpoint.

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What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
Thesis • A claim was made without a clear line of reasoning. • There was no line of reasoning in the response. Instead, a response included documents and/or concepts as the attempt at a line of reasoning. • A clear claim was not made that addressed the prompt, instead responses would attempt to claim that both branches effectively preserve limited government.	• *"An elected legislature is more important than an independant judiciary in preserving limited government beacuse the legislature can be held responsible by the people, while also serving as a check on the other branches of government to prevent government overreach."* • *"Limited government is a democratic ideal, and one that has been the subject of continued debate. To preserve this ideal, an independent judiciary is more effective than an elected legislature. This is because an independent judicial branch has the ability to check and balance the other branches by limiting their overreach."*
Evidence • Responses included the incorrect use of foundational documents. For example, using the title of one document with a description of a different document or making vague, general claims about the documents that were not specific to the ideas in the documents. • Responses included evidence that was not relevant to the topic of the prompt.	• *"Article 1 of the Constitution defines Congress, its power to make laws, a system of two houses, and how the House of Representatives is meant to be elected by the people."* • *"Federalist No. 51 is an essay which argues that a strong system of checks and balances between a legislature, executive, and judiciary can encourage each branch to check each other and prevent government overreach."* • *"A later essay in the series, Federalist No. 78, explains the system of an independent judiciary with appointed judges and how it specifically can check and balance the other branches."*
Reasoning • The response provided evidence but did not provide a reasoned explanation as to why the evidence supported their claim or argument.	• *"Expanding the government's power and degrading the rights of the people would be disliked by most Americans and the current legislature would be voted out of power, so since the legislature is elected by the public, Congress has an incentive to maintain a limited government."* • *"An elected legislature, representing the will of the people, can prevent the Executive from expanding their power and trancending the constitutional limits of a limited government by using impeachment or veto-overrides."*

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	• *"First used in Marbury v. Madison (1803), judicial review allows the judiciary to review passed laws or official actions conducted by the other branches and name them unconstitutional if necessary. Because the judiciary has this power, they can decide under existing laws whether an action by another branch of government constitutes overreach."*
Alternative perspective • Responses did not state an alternative perspective to the prompt, but instead explained why the initial claim was incorrect.	• *"Some may argue that an independent judiciary is more effective in preserving limited government because they can use the power of judicial review to strike down laws that expand the government's power past the limits of the constitution. However, the courts have no ability to actually enfore their decision, so it is possible for the executive branch to simply ignore a court order for example, and continue to grow the government's power."*

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

Teachers could emphasize the benefit of beginning the response by taking a clear position (claim) and include a line of reasoning that supports that claim in order to establish a clear thesis. For example, "An elected legislature is more effective at preserving limited government because they are elected by the majority and are held accountable to the will of the people." It is most helpful for the reader to be able to see the clear thesis at the very start of the response. The clear thesis also "unlocks" the opportunity to earn additional points across the response, including the third evidence point and the alternative perspective point. Teachers should encourage students to begin their response with their thesis statement that takes a clear position on the question (claim) and provides an adjacent line of reasoning. Teachers could advise students not to include an alternative perspective while presenting their thesis, as it can make the thesis unclear.

Each section of the essay could be addressed as a separate skill that students can work toward mastering. After students become comfortable with each section, then teachers can design classroom practices and assessments to integrate the various elements of a successful argumentative essay. Teachers could spend time conducting structured, mini-lessons that break down each section of the argumentative essay; design exercises based around thesis creation, with a heavy emphasis on crafting thesis statements that take a clear position and establish a line of reasoning; create a lesson centered around how to accurately describe the information contained within the foundational documents; utilize practices designed to analyze and explain how the information found in these documents relates to both course concepts and more current events in order to better develop reasoning skills.

Teachers could consider providing students with a template for writing the argument essay that begins with a thesis statement, continues with two pieces of evidence and reasoning, and concludes with an alternative perspective. Having students use different color fonts for each section of the argument might also be helpful.

Teachers could spend time on the nine foundational documents to ensure that students can recall specific, descriptive information about each document that is relevant to major course concepts. For example, students needed to describe Federalist No. 51, and it wasn't enough to say, "Federalist No. 51 supports an elected

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legislature to preserve a limited government." Students needed to provide some phrasing that differentiates it from other foundational documents and use the document in a way relevant to the prompt, such as describing how checks and balances allows the Legislative Branch to limit the power of the Judicial and Legislative Branches.

Teachers could find ways in their classroom activities to incorporate the skill of reasoning and alternative perspective/rebuttal so students can practice this skill in settings other than the essay. For example, teachers could ask students to give a rebuttal to a position statement another student made in a class discussion.

Teachers could spend time in each unit of study tying course concepts to theories such as limited government. The basis of the argumentation free-response question is to test students' skill of argumentation and the nine foundational documents. But it is also to test students' ability to use course concepts or foundational documents and apply them to limited government. One method is to use the AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum and Exam Description (CED) to illustrate how key course concepts apply to the ideal of limited government.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. The CED includes a section on the Foundational Documents that are required for this course on pages 25–26. The introduction to this section states, "Foundational documents are necessary for students to understand the philosophical underpinnings and political values of the U.S. political system and may serve as the focus of AP Exam questions. Source analysis of these documents helps students gain an understanding of how philosophical discussions and debates shaped the architecture of the government." This section also includes a table that provides suggestions for places in the course where these documents are particularly related to specific learning objectives.

- Information about the required foundational documents for this FRQ can be found throughout the CED. Topic 1.6 "Principles of American Democracy" addresses *Federalist* No. 51 and connects that document to the constitutional provisions of separation of powers and checks and balances. Topic 2.8 "The Judicial Branch" discusses the importance of an independent judiciary and connects to *Federalist* No. 78. Topic 2.1 "Congress: The Senate and the House of Representatives" as well as Topic 2.2 "Structures, Powers, and Functions of Congress" discuss the constitutional basis for an elected legislature. Topic 1.1 "Ideals of Democracy" provides explanation of the democratic ideal of limited government.

- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase challenge as teachers progress through the course.

- AP Classroom also includes topic-specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. 1.1: Daily Video 1 introduces the ideals of American Democracy including limited government. Topic 1.6 provides a

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number of useful videos. 1.6: Daily Video 1 focuses on *Federalist* No. 51 and how the ideas of separation of powers and checks and balances are described in the Constitution. 1.6: Daily Video 2 focuses on the constitutional principle of checks and balances, and the implications of the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances. 1.6: Daily Video 3 focuses on the process of analyzing an author's argument or perspective as the second part of the process of writing the Argument Essay. Information about an elected legislature can be found in a couple of videos. 2.2: Daily Video 2 focuses on the enumerated and implied powers of Congress in the Constitution, and how those powers allow for the creation of public policy. 2.2: Daily Video 1 focuses on how differences in structures, powers, and functions, and the constitutional responsibilities of the Senate and House, affect the policy-making process. Finally, 2.8: Daily Video 1 provides some information about an independent judiciary by looking at the judicial branch's powers and independence, including *Federalist* No. 78.

- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the Argument Essay FRQ, Unit 5-Argumentation.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

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